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**GRAUSTARK**

...By...  
**GEORGE BARR MCCUTCHEON**

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"Be calm, sir," cautioned Dangloss. "I may have my views, but I am not willing to take oath before her royal highness. Listen: You were heard to say you would kill him. You began the fight. You were the aggressor, and there is no one else on earth, it is said, who could have wished to murder him. The man who did the stabbing entered the room through the hall door and left by the same. There are drops of blood in the carpet, leading direct to your door. On your knob are the prints of bloody fingers where you—or some one else—placed his hand in opening the door. It was this discovery, made by me and my men, that fully convinced the enraged friends of the dead prince that you were guilty. When we opened the door, you were gone. Then came the search, the flight at the head of the stairs and the race to the prison. The reason I saved you from that mob should be plain to you. I love my princess, and I do not forget that you risked your life, each of you, to protect her. I have done all that I can, gentlemen, to protect you in return. It means death to you if you fall into the hands of his followers just now. A few hours will cool them off no doubt, but now—now it would be madness to face them. I know not what they have done to my men at the hotel—perhaps butchered them."

There was anxiety in Dangloss' voice, and there was honesty in his keen old eyes. His charges now saw the situation clearly and apologized warmly for the words they had uttered under the pressure of somewhat extenuating circumstances. They expressed a willingness to remain in the prison until the excitement abated or until some one swore his life against the supposed murderer. They were virtually prisoners, and they knew it well. Furthermore, they could see that Baron Dangloss believed Lorry guilty of the murder. Protestations of innocence had been politely received and politely disregarded.

"Do you expect one of his friends to take the oath?" asked Lorry.

"Yes; it is sure to come."

"But you will not do so yourself?"

"No."

"I thank you, captain, for I see that you believe me guilty."

"I do not say you are guilty, remember, but I will say that if you did murder Prince Lorenz you have made the people of Graustark rejoice from the bottoms of their hearts, and you will be eulogized from one end of the land to the other."

"Hanged and eulogized," said Lorry grimly.

**CHAPTER XVII.**

**IN THE TOWER.**

THE two captives who were not prisoners were so dazed by the unexpected events of the morning that they did not realize the vast seriousness of the situation for hours. Then it dawned upon them that appearances were really against them and that they were alone in a land far beyond the reach of help from home. One circumstance puzzled them with its damming mystery: How came the blood stains upon the doorknob? Dangloss curiously discussed this strange and unfortunate feature with them, but with ill concealed skepticism. It was evident that his mind was clear in regard to the whole affair.

Anguish was of the opinion that the real murderer had stained the knob intentionally, aiming to cast suspicion on the man who had been challenged. The assassin had an object in leaving those convicting finger marks where they would do the most damage. He either desired the arrest and death of the American or hoped that his own guilt might escape attention through the misleading evidence. Lorry held, from his deductions, that the crime had been committed by a fanatic who loved his sovereign too devotedly to see her wedded to Lorenz. Then why should he wantonly cast guilt upon the man who had been her protector, objected Dangloss.

The police guards came in from the hotel about 10 o'clock, bearing marks of an ugly conflict with the Axphainians. They reported that the axphainians had been quelled for the time being, but that a deputation had already started for the castle to lay the matter before the princess. Officers had searched the rooms of the Americans for blood stains, but had found no sign of them.

"Did you find bloody water in which hands had been washed?" asked Anguish.

"No," responded one of the guards. "There was nothing to be found in the bowls and jars except soapy water. There is not a blood stain in the room, captain."

"That shakes your theory a little, eh?" cried Anguish triumphantly. "Examine Mr. Lorry's hands and see if there is blood upon them." Lorry's hands were white and uncontaminated. Dangloss wore a pucker on his brow.

Shortly afterward a crowd of Axphain men came to the prison gates and demanded the person of Grenfall Lorry, departing after an ugly show of rage. Curious Edelweiss citizens stood afar off, watching the walls and windows eagerly.

"This may cost Edelweiss a great

deal of trouble, gentlemen, but there is more happiness here this morning than the city has known in months. Everybody believes you killed him, Mr. Lorry, but they all love you for the deed," said Dangloss, returning at noon from a visit to the hotel and a ride through the streets. "The prince's friends have been at the castle since 9 o'clock, and I am of the opinion that they are having a hard time with the high priests."

"God bless her!" cried Lorry. "The town is crazy with excitement. Messengers have been sent to old Prince Bolario to inform him of the murder and to urge him to hasten hither, where he may fully enjoy the vengeance that is to be worked upon his son's slayer. I have not seen a wilder time in Edelweiss since the close of the siege, fifteen years ago. By my soul, you are in a bad box, sir. They are hurrying in every part of town to kill you if you attempt to leave the tower before the princess signs an order to restrain you legally. Your life outside these walls would not be worth a snap of the fingers."

Captain Quinox of the princess' bodyguard, accompanied by a half dozen of his men, rode up to the prison gates about 2 o'clock and was promptly admitted. The young captain was in sore distress.

"The Duke of Mizrox has sworn that you are the murderer, Mr. Lorry, and stakes his life," said he after greetings. "Her highness has just placed in my hands an order for your arrest as the assassin of Prince Lorenz."

Lorry turned as pale as death. "You—you don't mean to say that she has signed a warrant—that she believes me guilty?" he cried, aghast.

"She has signed the warrant, but very much against her inclination. Count Halfont informed me that she pleaded and argued with the duke for hours, seeking to avert the act which is bound to give pain to all of us. He was obdurate and threatened to carry complaint to Bolario, who would instantly demand satisfaction. As the duke is willing to die if you are proved innocent, there was no other course left for her than to dictate and sign this royal decree. Captain Dangloss, I am instructed to give you these papers. One is the warrant for Mr. Lorry's arrest, the other orders you to assume charge of him and to place him in confinement until the day of trial."

While Quinox was making this statement the accused stood with bowed head and throbbing heart. He did not see the captain's hand tremble as he passed the documents to Dangloss, nor did he hear the unhappy sigh that came from the latter's lips. Anguish, fiery and impulsive, was not to be subdued.

"Is there no warrant for my arrest?" he demanded.

"There is not. You are at liberty to go, sir," responded Quinox.

"I'd like to know why there isn't! I am just as guilty as Lorry."

"The duke charges the crime to but one of you. Baron Dangloss, will you read the warrant?"

The old chief read the decree of the princess slowly and impressively. It was as follows:

Jacot, duke of Mizrox, before his God and on his life, swears that Grenfall Lorry did foully, maliciously and designedly slay Lorenz, prince of Axphain, on the 20th day of October, in the year of our Lord 18—, and in the city of Edelweiss, Graustark. It is therefore my decree that Grenfall Lorry be declared murderer of Lorenz, prince of Axphain, until he be proved innocent, in which instance his accuser, Jacot, duke of Mizrox, shall forfeit his life, according to the law of this land providing penalty for false witness, and by which he himself has sworn to abide faithfully.

Signed, YETIVE.

There was silence for some moments, broken by the dreary tones of the accused.

"What chance have I to prove my innocence?" he asked hopelessly.

"The same opportunity that he has to prove your guilt. The duke must, according to our law, prove you guilty beyond all doubt," spoke the young captain.

"When am I to be tried?"

"Here is my order from the princess," said Dangloss, glancing over the other paper. "It says that I am to confine you securely and to produce you before the tribunal on the 20th day of October."

"A week! That is a long time," said Lorry. "May I have permission to see the signature affixed to those papers?" Dangloss handed them to him. He glanced at the name he loved, written by the hand he had kissed, now signing away his life, perhaps. A mist came over his eyes, and a strange joy filled his soul. The hand that signed the name had trembled in doing so—had trembled pitifully. The heart had not guided the fingers. "I am your prisoner, Captain Dangloss. Do with me as you will," he said simply.

"I regret that I am obliged to place you in a cell, sir, and under guard. Believe me, I am sorry this happened. I am your friend," said the old man gloomily.

"And I!" cried Quinox.

"But what is to become of me?" cried poor Anguish, half in tears. "I won't leave you, Gren. It's an infernal outrage!"

"Be cool, Harry, and it will come out right. He has no proof, you know," said the other, wringing his friend's

hand. "But I'll have to stay here too. If I go outside these walls, I'll be killed like a dog," protested Harry.

"You are to have a guard of six men while you are in Edelweiss, Mr. Anguish. Those are the instructions of the princess. I do not believe the scoundrels—I mean the Axphain nobles—will molest you if you do not cross them. When you are ready to go to your hotel, I will accompany you."

Half an hour later Lorry was in a cell from which there could be no escape, while Anguish was riding toward the hotel, surrounded by Graustark soldiers. He had sworn to his friend that he would unearth the murderer if it lay within the power of man. Captain Dangloss heard the oath and smiled sadly.

At the castle there were depression and relief, grief and joy. The royal family, the nobility, even the servants, soldiers and attendants, rejoiced in the stroke that had saved the princess from a fate worse than death. There were, of course, serious complications for the future, involving ugly conditions that were bound to force themselves upon the land. The dead man's father would demand the life of his murderer. If not Lorry, who?

In the privacy of her room the stricken princess collapsed from the effects



She sank back with a moan, fainting.

of the ordeal. Her poor brain had striven in vain to invent means by which she might save the man she loved. She had surrendered to the inevitable because there was justice in the claims of the inexorable duke and his vindictive friends. She signed the decree as if in a dream, a nightmare, with trembling hand and broken heart. His death warrant! And yet, like all others, she believed him guilty—guilty for her sake!

Mizrox and his friends departed in triumph, revenge written on every face. She walked blindly, numbly, to her room, assisted by her uncle, the count. Without observing her aunt or the Countess Dagmar, she staggered to the window and looked below. The Axphainians were crossing the parade ground jubilantly. Then came the clatter of a horse's hoof, and Captain Quinox, with the fatal papers in his possession, galloped down the avenue. She clutched the curtains distractedly and, leaning far forward, cried from the open window:

"Quinox! Quinox! Come back! I forbid—I forbid! Destroy those papers, Quinox!"

But Quinox heard not the pitiful wail. Seeing him disappear down the avenue, she threw her hands to her head and sank back with a moan, fainting. Count Halfont caught her in his arms. It was nightfall before she was fully revived. The faithful young countess clung to her caressingly, lovingly, uttering words of consolation until long after the shades of night had dropped. They were alone in the princess' boudoir, seated together upon the divan, the tired head of the one resting wearily against the shoulder of the other. Wide and dark and troubled were the eyes of the ruler of Graustark.

An attendant appeared and announced the arrival of one of the American gentlemen, who insisted on seeing her royal highness. The card on the tray bore the name of Anguish. At once the princess was a-flutter with eagerness and excitement.

"Anguish! Show him to this room quickly! Oh, Dagmar, he brings word from him! He comes from him! Why is he so slow? Ah, I cannot wait!"

Far from being slow, Anguish was exceedingly swift in approaching the room to which he feared admittance might be denied.

"Tell me! What is it?" she cried as he stopped in the center of the room and glared at her.

"I don't care whether you like it, and it doesn't matter if you are a princess," he exploded, "there are a few things I'm going to say to you. First, I want to know what kind of a woman you are to throw into prison a man like—like—oh, it drives me crazy to think of it! I don't care if you are insulted. He's a friend of mine, and he is no more guilty than you are, and I want to know what you mean by ordering his arrest."

Her lips parted as if to speak, her face grew deathly pale, her fingers clutched the edge of the divan. She stared at him piteously, unable to move, to speak. Then the blue eyes filled with tears, a sob came to her lips, and her tortured heart made a last brave effort at defense.

"I—I—Mr. Anguish, you wrong me—I—I— She tried to whisper through the closed throat and stiffened lips. Words failed her, but she pleaded with those wet, imploring eyes. His heart melted, his anger was swept away in a twinkling. He saw that he had wounded her most unjustly.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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